APPENDIX F

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

F.1 Sample Press Release

(Still being completed)

F.2 General risk communication guidelines

- **Know the stakeholders**

  Identifying both external and internal stakeholders and finding out their diverse and sometimes competing interests and concerns is the first step to any successful risk communication effort. The best way to determine stakeholder interests and concerns is to ask them! Conduct interviews with key leaders both outside and inside your organization. Use the information gathered in this step to develop your risk communication program for establishing collaborative problem-solving and communication efforts.

- **Simplify language and presentation, not content**

  When trying to communicate the complex issues behind a health risk, it is easy to leave out information that seems to be overly technical. Risk communication research and studies have proven that all audience members can understand any technical subject if it is presented properly. This can be done, for example, through the use of visuals and diagrams and by defining all technical, medical and scientific jargon and acronyms.

- **Be objective, not subjective**

  It is often very easy to differentiate between opinions and facts. It can be difficult, however, to respond credibly to opinions without substantiating them or offending the individual asking the question. In order to maintain credibility, respond to both opinions and facts in the same manner.

- **Communicate clearly and honestly**

  To communicate clearly, present information at the audience's level of understanding. People can reject information that is too difficult for them or they can reject a communicator who is perceived to be dishonest or untrustworthy. As a result, they may refuse to acknowledge the information or become hostile. On the other hand, they may become hostile if they feel patronized. The bottom line is – know the audience! In addition, whenever possible, provide familiar examples and concrete information that can help put the risk in perspective.

- **Deal with uncertainty**

  When communicating health risks, results are not definitive. Discuss sources of uncertainty, such as how the data were gathered, how they were analyzed, and how the results were interpreted. This demonstrates that the uncertainties are recognized, which can lead to an increase in trust and credibility. However, when discussing uncertainty, the communicator should stress his or her expertise and knowledge of the subject. This will reinforce the leadership's ability to handle the situation and could allay concerns and fears regarding the risk and the risk-management decision.

- **Be cautious when using risk comparisons**

  In order to put risks in perspective, comparing an unfamiliar risk to a familiar one can be helpful. However, some types of comparisons can alienate audience members. Avoid comparing unrelated risks, such as the risks associated with smoking versus those associated with air contamination. People rarely accept the comparison of unrelated risk.

- **Develop key messages**

  Key messages are those items of importance, the health risk information that needs to be communicated. They must be clear, concise, and to-the-point. No more than three messages should be communicated at one time. Repeat key messages as often as possible to ensure they are not misunderstood or misinterpreted.

- **Be prepared**

  Most questions and concerns can be anticipated if the audience is known. In fact, the communicator should know 70 percent of the possible questions that could be asked. Consider how to answer general questions and how to respond to specific inquiries.

F.3 Risk communication guide for state or local agencies

Much of the following is excerpted from "Risk Communication Guide for State and Local Agencies", produced be the California state Office of Emergency Services (October 2001). The full copy of the report can be requested from Yvonne Addassi (OSPR; see Appendix A) or by accessing the following internet web site:

http://www.oes.ca.gov/oeshomep.nsf/all/RiskGuide/$file/RiskGuide.pdf

Key risk issues often of interest to the community

- Consequences of worst-case and alternative scenarios and the likelihood of disaster.
- Local government and community emergency response actions, and how those have been factored into state and federal response actions.
- Community notification systems.
- Perceived risks as reported by the media.
- Use of standards and accepted practices.
- Safety thresholds and limits.
- Acceptance of the decision process and decisions by the technical, scientific and environmental communities
- Other potential considerations (*e.g.*, business (including commercial fishing and tourism) and recreation (including fishing and beach access) impacts.

- Pay as much attention to community outrage factors, and to the community's concerns, as you do to scientific data. At the same time, do not underestimate the public's ability to understand technical information**.**

General risk perception and communication issues

- Risks under individual control are accepted more readily than those subject to industry or government control.

  At the time of an actual spill response and/or a decision to use dispersants, response actions will be directed by the Unified Command. It is important that during an oil spill emergency response, actions taken are quick, well-considered, yet nevertheless directive. To offset public unease at how heavy-handed this may seem, it will be helpful to briefly review how various stakeholder groups and the public were included in preceding dispersant response planning process, and how the current dispersant decision is being guided by real-time data gathering. Also include information on other agency consultations, and how particular concerns about living resources, fishery impacts, and socioeconomic impacts will be addressed.

- Risks that seem fair are more acceptable than those that seem unfair.

  It may be helpful to explain the Net Environmental Benefit Analysis process that was used in the response planning phase. At that time, it was determined that 1) harm would occur as a result of a spill, and 2) the goal is to minimize the overall harm and spare the most sensitive resources, and provide a net environmental benefit. However, the communicator will also need to address questions of impacts to business and coastal and ocean access, as these were not considered at the time that net environmental benefits were being weighed during the planning process.

- Risk information that comes from trustworthy sources is more readily believed than information from untrustworthy sources.

  Use the guidance offered above in Appendix F.2.

- Exotic risks seem more dangerous than familiar risks.

  Use of dispersants in California is not yet a common oil spill response practice. The public will expect to see that all other means to recover oil using the more traditional mechanical means have been considered. They also need to understand the circumstances under which dispersants may cause less harm to the environment than would those more traditional mechanical recovery tools, and how all means to recover and/or re-locate the oil to less sensitive environmental "compartments" will be used.

- Risks that are "undetectable" are perceived as more dangerous.

  It is extremely likely that the public will interpret a decision to use dispersants as a decision to "hide" the oil. These concerns need to be addressed openly and honestly, drawing on the communication tools in Appendix F.2 as well as the resource impact information generated during the dispersant Net Environmental Benefit Analysis response planning process.

F.3, continued

Possible objectives of a risk communication program

- Research the issues with stakeholders to gather sufficient information to identify the most important risk communication objectives to address.
- Identifying the stakeholders to anticipate or assess their varying interests, in order to design an effective risk communication program is a critical initial task.
- Stakeholders can include the residential, business, commercial or industrial communities, your agency and other agencies (local and state governments, special districts), environmental groups, and general interested members of the public. Media members may also be present.
- The level of stakeholder interest is a driving force in the assignment of risk communication priorities -- properly identifying and understanding all stakeholder objectives will enhance risk communication effectiveness.
- Communication objectives may include:
  - informing the community, seeking input or feedback, clarifying the probability and consequences of potential risks, addressing existing controversies or concerns, providing a forum for discussion, improving stakeholder understanding and support of government decisions, clarifying agency roles in controlling risk, coordinating federal and state emergency response plans with local government and business emergency response plans, and satisfying regulatory requirements to communicate risk.
- Potentially important objectives during and after the incident include:
  - retaining credibility and trust, clarifying how the current incident compares to the previously assessed risk, identifying how lessons-learned will be used to decrease risks and consequences in the future, and providing enhancements to future community emergency response.

Defining effective risk communication activities during and after incidents

- If an incident was noticed by or impacted the public, time is of the essence in providing information to the community.
- Several communication media (*e.g.*, newspapers, television, radio, technical journals) will be readily available, but not necessarily controllable.
- The community will gauge the success of the incident investigation efforts and control of causal factors by how much information is communicated to the community.
- If there is a high degree of uncertainty, focus the risk communication effort on what is being done to control the emergency. Keep the communication channels open.
- Contact news media to provide information. See "**Guidelines for meeting with the media**" below. If there is uncertainty with respect to event chronology or causes, release the information prudently and properly identify that the information is preliminary, but additional information will be provided as it becomes available.
- After an incident:
  - Ensure that any preliminary information has been verified, clarified or modified so that future references to the incident will be factual.
  - Follow-up with local and regional media to verify key information and provide a close-out mechanism for the spill response.
  - Be honest and candid with the public and media, using the guidelines in Appendix F.2.a

Choosing the right representatives

- Use field/community relations staff to relay community concerns within the agency.
- Choose carefully those who represent the agency, and provide appropriate support (e.g.
- Technically-qualified people should have a major role in risk communication.
- For effective communication, representatives need to address technical, communication and authority issues.
- If possible, use the same agency representative throughout the life of the event.
- In some situations, a non-agency representative may be more useful than someone from inside an agency.

Responding personally

- When you speak at a public meeting, tell people who you are, what your background is, and why you are there.
- When speaking personally, put your views into the context of your own values, and urge your audience to do the same.
- If your personal position does not agree with agency policy, do not misrepresent yourself or mislead the community.
- Prepare responses to potential questions before the meeting.

F.3, continued

Creating and maintaining trust and credibility during and after an incident

- Maintain open channels of communication.
- Provide critical information promptly.
- Ensure that the public receives a clear message that the emergency responders are taking appropriate actions to mitigate the event.
- Provide a resource for the public to call to secure additional information.
- Take appropriate steps to promptly investigate the cause of the event.
- Ensure that the public receives a clear message that an investigation of the incident was performed and appropriate actions to prevent a future incident were identified for implementation.
- Provide appropriate follow-up information and follow through with any commitments to the community.
- Recognize that people's values and feelings are a legitimate aspect of public health and safety issues and that such concerns may convey valuable information.
- When people are speaking emotionally, respond to their emotions. Do not merely respond with data.
- Be aware of your own values and feelings about an issue and the effect they have on you.
- Empathetic words will be effective only if your tone of voice, body language and demeanor reinforce what you are saying.

Guidelines for meeting with the media

- Be prepared. Plan what you want to say and anticipate reporter's questions.
- Take and keep control. You decide where to be interviewed. Bridge to your points or to turn negative questions into positive responses. Don't repeat negatives. Know when to exit the interview.
- Make your point. Bring your own agenda to the interview. Stress positive aspects of your operation.
- Keep your composure and watch your body language. Look and sound like you want to be there. Be cooperative, not combative. Avoid a defensive appearance.
- Don't speculate. If you do not have an answer, say so. Do not answer hypothetical questions. Do not feel all questions must be answered immediately.
- Never say "No Comment". Give sound reasons why you cannot answer a question (proprietary information, lack of authority, etc.).
- Never go "Off the Record". Anything you say may be reported. Do not be tricked into answering a question when a reporter says he has turned off a microphone or camera.

F.4 Planning a public meeting: Checklist

As discussed in Appendix F.3, public meetings are one way to involve the community stakeholders in your agency's spill response communications plan. They can be organized in many different ways, depending on the goal, topic, audience and other factors. This checklist will help with general elements that would apply to most public meetings.

PUBLIC MEETING CHECKLIST

MEETING PURPOSE

Organizations and individuals identified? ❑Yes ❑ No
Interests identified and categorized? ❑Yes ❑ No

Meeting time: _____
Date: _____
Hours: _____
Meeting place(s): _____
Address: _____
_____

Central location? ❑Yes ❑ No
Public transportation access? ❑Yes ❑ No
Suitable parking? ❑Yes ❑ No
Safe area? ❑Yes ❑ No
Adequate space? ❑Yes ❑ No
Adequate facilities? ❑Yes ❑ No

Total expected: _____

General session planned? ❑Yes ❑ No
Number of small groups/number in each: _____ / _____

Agenda questions developed? ❑Yes ❑ No
Schedule developed? ❑Yes ❑ No
Stakeholder interest topics included? ❑Yes ❑ No
Speakers and speaker order identified? ❑Yes ❑ No

INFORMATION DEVELOPMENT AND PRESENTATION

Information to be provided: _____
_____
_____

Written information completed? ❑ Yes ❑ No
Role for moderator identified? ❑ Yes ❑ No
Moderator rehearsed? ❑ Yes ❑ No

PUBLICITY

Methods selected: _____
_____
_____

Material prepared? ❑Yes ❑ No
Number of copies: _____
Material distributed? ❑Yes ❑ No
Personal follow-up? ❑Yes ❑ No
PIO/JIC contacted? ❑Yes ❑ No
Message developed? ❑Yes ❑ No
Message approved? ❑Yes ❑ No
Answers prepared? ❑Yes ❑ No
Press release issued? ❑Yes ❑ No

MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

Tables, chairs, lecterns obtained? ❑Yes ❑ No
Audio/visual equipment obtained? ❑Yes ❑ No
Registration table? ❑Yes ❑ No
Name tags? ❑Yes ❑ No
Refreshments? ❑Yes ❑ No
Heating & cooling OK? ❑Yes ❑ No
Sound & lights OK? ❑Yes ❑ No
Pens, pencils, flipcharts? ❑Yes ❑ No

RECORDING THE PROCEEDINGS

Methods: _____
Moderators: _____
Meeting evaluation tools: _____
Recommendations made? ❑ Yes ❑ No
Recommendations taken? ❑ Yes ❑ No
Post-meeting report to public made? ❑ Yes ❑ No

F.5 Dispersant fact sheet

Include in press packet, distribute at public meetings, or use for other general background briefing and information purposes.

Oil Spill Dispersants

One tool used occasionally in oil spill response is chemical dispersants. Under strict approvals and a narrow set of conditions, dispersants can be sprayed from planes, helicopters or boats onto oil spills in California marine waters. Chemical dispersants break a slick into smaller droplets, promoting mixture of oil into the water column, and accelerating dilution and biological degradation.

Conditions of use

- Federal and state approval for dispersant applications in California is considered when an effective conventional response is not feasible or not totally adequate in containing or controlling the spill.
- Before dispersants are used the response agencies will use all real-time information at their disposal to determine the resources at probable risk from both the oil and the dispersants used against it. Any dispersant application must follow strict guidelines laid down by several agencies and the groups, biologists and community members that assist with advice to those agencies. The federal and state response agencies will make every effort to communicate their oil spill response decisions to the public, through the media and/or in public meetings.
- The primary oil spill response method used in California is mechanical containment and recovery, which involves the use of containment booms, skimmers and other related equipment. The many hindrances to spill recovery, however, place a real advantage to having many "tools in the toolbox", as historically, no more than 10 percent of the oil has been recovered from large marine spills. Current mechanical technology is not effective in waves greater than about 6 feet, winds greater than 20 knows, or currents greater than 1 knot.
- Dispersants are best used to protect shorelines, when the damage to the shore and nearby marine life would be worse than dispersing the oil into deeper offshore water.
- Dispersants are best used on the leading edge of oil slicks, which might otherwise get out of control and head toward shore.
- Dispersants must be applied soon after the oil is spilled and before the oil weathers or the slick is broken up. This usually means dispersant application with a matter of several hours to a few days, depending on spilled oil circumstances.
- The best conditions are whet the water is deep and when there is sufficient mixing action from waves, wind or current.

How dispersants work

- Dispersants help prevent formation of water-oil emulsions, or mousse, and they speed up biological breakdown of oil by natural marine organisms. They also ability of oil to stick to sediments and other organisms in the water.

Limitations on dispersant application

- Only dispersants approved by federal and California state governments can be used, and only on oils that have a fairly high likelihood of being "dispersible".
- Ocean and weather conditions must be conducive to dispersant use.
- The spilled oil must be at least 3 miles from shore and not within a National Marine Sanctuary, or other agency approvals will be required before they can be used.
- Dispersant use must be considered to provide a "net environmental benefit" – in other words, once the oil is spilled, resources somewhere are going to be negatively impacted, so the goal is to minimize impacts to the most sensitive resources in the area at the time of the spill.
- Dispersants have to be applied safely, and dispersants cannot continue to be used if they are not effective.